
MIDDLE MOUNTAIN INTERPRETIVE HIKES



Image Adopted from Thompson & West History of Sutter County 1879

SPRING 2021

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hope Springs Eternal

BY GREG PAYNE

If you live close enough to the Sutter Buttes—a small, circular complex of eroded volcanic lava domes – you realize that their unique vegetation is changing. All during the summer and well into the fall, they were cloaked in brown and tan colored dried grasses and spent wildflowers. Their only shades of green, softly coated by the Sacramento Valley's dusty air, were from the oaks and other trees on the Buttes' gently rolling hillsides. Thankfully, rain has finally begun and is beginning to work its special magic. During the second week of January, my wife and I took a peaceful, scenic drive around the Sutter Buttes. We noticed (even from a distance) that seeds from the annual plants were starting to germinate—a welcome reassurance from Mother Nature that hope springs eternal. The Buttes' grasses and winter plants (filarees, for example) are slowly growing and covering the earthy ground with a wondrous green carpet. As rains occur, last year's stems of wilted grasses are toppling to the ground while new stalks are strongly rising to life and becoming much more visible. This is when the acclaimed "greening" of the Sutter Buttes and all other California-hillsides occur. Unfortunately, this year, the change has been a lot slower due to low rainfall.

Although, it is still better than the winter of 2013 - 2014. That year, virtually no rain occurred until January, and the Buttes did not "green-up" until February.

What would be best, of course, would be to take a nature walk and see the new plants as they grow along paths that we hike in the

we are not scheduling any springtime hikes in the Sutter Buttes due to the same safety issues I mentioned in my fall-newsletter message. It may seem like social distancing would be easy when hiking outdoors, but it is not. Like our name says, our hikes are interpretive; therefore, each guide's group of hikers has to stay close enough to hear the guide. Another point of concern for Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes (MMIH) is that hikers tend to gather close together when looking at a particular wildflower or passing around an interesting object.

There is hope. The vaccine for the coronavirus is being distributed and soon the danger of contracting the disease will lessen. Rest assured, MMIH is going to keep watching and waiting for that highly anticipated time when it is safe to once again hike in the Sutter Buttes. When this occurs,

a hike schedule will be posted at: www.middlemountainhikes.org. And take note, when those lovely spring flowers and trees start to blossom in your own neighborhoods, remember to visit our website for the slight possibility that ... just maybe (due to less COVID-19 risk) ... you will find an "open-for-reservation" hike eagerly awaiting your registration. That is our hopeful springtime wish for you and all of us at MMIH!



Spring in the Buttes by Pete Sands

interior of the Sutter Buttes. Unfortunately, we are still trying to stay safe and healthy while COVID-19 is still a threat. Personally, I would love to lead a group of hikers, safely masked and appropriately distanced, on an educational trek in the Buttes. But I am 73-years old and with the vaccine just around the corner, I am not going to put myself in jeopardy. Many of our other volunteer guides and back-up-guides have similar concerns. So, for the present time,

The Mission of Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes

“Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes advances the understanding of the natural and cultural features of the Sutter Buttes through interactive educational activities for schoolchildren and the public.”



Who We Are

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VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Share Your Sutter Buttes' Memory With Us

BY MIKE HUBBARTT

Usually, it is sheer curiosity that provokes more than half of our supporters from Northern California to sign-up for a hiking adventure in the private rangelands of the Sutter Buttes with the nonprofit organization, Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes (MMIH). Happily, we often hear these excited words: “I’ve always wanted to see the inside of the Buttes!” Which is why, statistically, during an average year, MMIH annually provides interpretive guided access to 1,500 hikers and 1,500 schoolchildren.

For those of us who proudly live in small, rural farming towns located near one of the captivating “four sides of the Sutter Buttes,” we feel a deep-spiritual connection to their handsome rugged peaks, hills and canyons. I bet that most of us are compelled to drive around them at least once every year! I know I am! Incredibly, local residents are a mere 15 or 20-minutes’ drive away from closely appreciating the majestic wonder and grand beauty of the Buttes’ silent, strong, peaceful, yet powerful presence. Unfortunately, during these unsettling times, many of us here at MMIH, as well as others in Northern California, recently experienced the loss of a friend or loved one. If so, it is our sincere hope that some nature-filled time in the Buttes could be beneficial. It has been proven that nature is a soothing, healing and soulful experience. Therefore, this makes the Buttes important to everyone! And, since the directives from the California CDC greatly impacted our normal-hiking schedules,

we invite and encourage each of you, to instead, take an unforgettable drive around the iconic, historic landmark, the Sutter Buttes. Find a safe place to pull off the road and park...Relax and breathe in the fresh air. Gaze up



Photo by Pete Sands

into the Sutter Buttes’ silent, strong, peaceful and powerful presence and thoughtfully reflect upon special memories or just thoroughly enjoy the well-spent time admiring the Buttes, themselves...

Please share your special Sutter Buttes’ memory with us! Send your photo of the Buttes along with a written memory to: mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com. We will hold a drawing every week and post the winning entry on our Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes’ Facebook page. We will include a note about the history and/or the mystery of your photo’s view if it is selected! Remember to “Like and Follow” our Facebook page! Stay in touch with us and the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust. Soon, we will all be hiking the dearly beloved Sutter Buttes, once again!



Like Us on Facebook!



Tribute to Pete Sands

BY LAURA LUSH

In November of 2020, MMIH lost a great friend when Peter Sands died suddenly and left a hole in many of our lives. You may know Pete from a bird hike or maybe, a wildflower stroll, but most of you would recognize him as the husband of 4th-generation landowner, Margit Sands of the Dean Place Ranch. Pete and Margit were introduced by the founder of Middle Mountain, Walt Anderson—so Pete was indisputably woven into our organization.

Pete was a 6th-generation San Franciscan but spent more time outdoors and in nature than in the city. In 1983 when Margit and Pete married, he became a farmer. He loved the tractors, cows, and land of Dean Place, but maybe not so much the fences. Pete was well known in the birding community and spent a good bit of his career working in botany—grasses and oaks, to be specific. He would bemoan the fact that not enough people study and learn to identify grasses, and he was our go-to



for plant identification. I always think of one Guide's Day when a large number of us were following him on a flower walk. He was taking us to see a hillside covered with purple owl's clover, but we had a hard time reaching our destination because we kept circling him like little kids with a constant stream of "Pete, what's this?" "Over here, what's this one?" We were literally pulling on his vest to get his attention. He was a good sport.

Pete led many birders into Dean Place through the decades. He was a co-organizer of the Peace Valley Circle of the National Audubon Christmas Day Bird Count for nearly 40 years and also lead hikes for the Central Valley Bird Club for many years during



their annual Symposium and for the Snow Goose Festival. His Snow Goose hike had a good following, and I usually led a hike on the day following Pete's bird walk. Quite often I had folks bemoaning the fact they could not get onto Pete's hike—and just as often, he would show up somewhere on the trail and join us! One special hike we had five species of warblers in the canopy of the oaks, and Pete and several hikers laid back on the hillside of the North Trail and watched the action. He always talked about that hike and how great it was to have folks along who were just as enthralled as he was. And nobody—but nobody—was happier to help another birder find a life bird! And he usually got even more excited than the person seeing their first Townsend's Warbler or Lawrence's Goldfinch. I got my White Crown Sparrow through an early morning phone call to come out and try to find it again with him! He just chuckled when the bird was right where he had seen it last.

Chuckling was a Pete specialty. He loved to laugh, tell silly stories, and get others laughing, too. Take another look at the cow pictures. He loved to caption them and kept a file of photos he called 'The Far Side—the cows provided great comic relief for his otherwise more serious photography. One advantage of being part of the Buttes is that he had awesome access to his favorite subject matter—birds, flowers, plants, and lichen. One day, after

being told that there were visible eaglets in an aerie, Margit said she lost him for three days until he got the photos he wanted.

If you knew Pete, you have stories to share. It is hard to not just go on—I have many. I was fortunate to have him as a great friend and mentor for 20 years. But if you were not lucky enough to have hiked with



Pete, you might be surprised when I tell you that, really, you have. Because he was a mentor to so many of us Guides and BuGs, his knowledge and stories run through all of our discussions. We share his knowledge and joy when we lead our own hikes.

If you would like to read his official obituary, the link is below. We wanted to share our MMIH side of Pete with you. Additionally, we are looking to place a bench in his memory, along with the one we have for our dear Karen, who many of you knew for so long. If you would like to contribute, please send a check to Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes at PO Box 3613, Yuba City, CA 95992. Please make checks payable to MMIH. Thank you!

Link to Pete Sands' Official Obituary Is: <https://legcy.co/3kjRWY3>

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MMIH Gift Certificates
are always a great gift
idea for hikers and
nature enthusiasts!

TO SIGN UP FOR MIDDLE MOUNTAIN INTERPRETIVE HIKES
E-NEWSLETTERS, PLEASE CONTACT THE
OPEN-HIKES COORDINATOR AT
MMSUTTERBUTTESHIKES@YAHOO.COM OR 530-370-4777

SUTTER COUNTY MUSEUM UPCOMING EVENTS



The Sutter County Museum is temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

Please sign-up for the museum's monthly eNewsletter to receive updates about upcoming programs and events!

The Sutter Buttes' Regional Land Trust "Sutter Buttes 2021 Calendar" is available for purchase at the museum (by appointment). Please call 530-822-7141 to arrange a 'shopping time.'

Contact Us

Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes is a group of dedicated individuals who work on a part-time basis, most of us volunteering our time. You can reach us:

- On our website: www.middlemountainhikes.org
- By mail: PO Box 3613, Yuba City, CA 95992-3613
- Kelly Gash, Open Hikes Coordinator, mmsutterbutteshikes@yahoo.com or 530-370-4777
- Margit Sands, Charter Hikes Coordinator, sandsmp@comcast.net or 530-846-5142
- Gregory & Kathleen Payne, Education Program Coordinators, gregkathy72@gmail.com or 530-218-1346

Please leave detailed messages or requests for information. We appreciate your patience and understanding and, especially, your interest in the Sutter Buttes.

Newsletter

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